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AUTHOR Breen, Dorothy Tysse; Geroski, Anne
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ABSTRACT

When school counselors, teachers, and parents use play techniques with an accepting, safe relationship, they foster development of children's interpersonal needs which are fused with positive experiences at school and at home. This paper uses Kaufman's (1989) model of interpersonal needs as a theoretical framework to support the use of play techniques by school counselors. It also extends this framework to validate classroom teachers' and parents' use of play techniques as they foster the development of children. It offers many suggestions that show how school counselors can use play techniques to influence children's growth in each of Kaufman's interpersonal needs. School counselors help to reinforce the acquisition of developmental skills by collaborating with teachers and parents. School counselors, teachers, and parents can work as a system to facilitate developmental growth in children. The paper lists each of Kaufman's interpersonal needs of the child, and the role the counselor, teacher, and parents play in helping with the child's development. (Contains 20 references.) (JDM)

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Dorothy Tysse Breen
Anne Geroski

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School Counselors, Teachers, and Parents: Using Play Techniques To Support Children's Development

Dorothy Tysse Breen, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor of Counselor Education at the University of Maine. Anne Geroski, Ed.D. is an Assistant Professor of Counselor Education at the University of Vermont.

School counselors are specialists who works with children to foster their personal, social, and academic growth (Myrick, 1993). Typically counselors in schools provide direct and indirect services including individual and small group counseling, large group classroom guidance, consultation with teachers and parents, special projects, and coordination of other guidance services (Myrick, 1993).

Many counselors in elementary schools use play techniques in their interventions with children to promote personal, social, and academic development (Allan & Brown, 1993; Barlow, Strother, & Landreth, 1986; Campbell, 1993; Fall, 1994; Kottman & Johnson, 1993; Landreth, 1991; Miles, 1993; Muro and Kottman, 1995; Myrick & Myrick, 1993; Stiles & Kottman; 1990; Woytowich, 1994). Without a theoretical rationale for their use, play techniques are often misunderstood when they are used by counselors in schools (Landreth, 1991; Muro & Kottman, 1995). In fact, Muro and Kottman (1995) caution that school counselors make sure to have the support of their building administrator when using play techniques and suggest that school counselors provide a rationale and overview of these techniques to assure their support.

In this article, we use Kaufman's (1989) model of interpersonal needs as a theoretical framework to support the use of play techniques by school counselors. We also extend this framework to validate classroom teachers and parents using play techniques as they foster the development of children.

Kaufman's Interpersonal Needs

According to Kaufman (1989), all children are born with basic interpersonal needs. These include the need for relationships with other people, the need for touching and holding, the need for identification (belonging and feeling "one" with others), the need for differentiation (being different and separate from others), the need to nurture (caring for and helping other people), the need for affirmation (feeling worthwhile, valued, and admired), and the need for power in relationships and in life in general (Kaufman, 1989; Kaufman & Raphael, 1990).

Kaufman (1989) interweaves issues of shame with themes of power with these primary needs. He believes that during childhood the interpersonal needs become associated with positive or negative affect, which in turn influences interpersonal relationships later in life. For example, interpersonal needs that are fused with positive affect enable the child, and later the adult, to form healthy interpersonal relationships. School counselors have opportunities to help children fuse interpersonal needs with positive affect. Interpersonal needs that are fused with negative affect such as shame, lead to later difficulties in relationships with others and cause the individual to carry

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disruptive shame binds into adulthood relationships. School counselors have opportunities to enable children who have interpersonal needs fused with negative affect, to re-experience their interpersonal needs in association with positive affect.

Play Techniques for Counseling Children

Play is the natural mode of expression and exploration for children. It is a form of language with which children learn to communicate and master their developmental needs by learning about themselves and the world around them (Ginot, 1961; Hughes, 1991; Landreth, 1987). Using play techniques in counseling provides children with the opportunity to "play out" their feelings and to "play out" their life situations in order to achieve mastery of their developmental needs (Axline, 1947; Landreth, 1993).

Child centered play techniques assume that children have an inner drive toward maturity, independence, and self-direction. The focus of this type of intervention is on establishing a security zone for the child to explore him or herself in relation to the counselor (Landreth, 1993). It is through these interactions that interpersonal skills are learned and corrective experiences occur. The directive approach is also centered on the relationship between the child and the counselor, however, the counselor assumes a more active role in making interpretations of the play and linking the play to the child's real life experiences (Oaklander, 1989; Schafer, 1985).

Use of Play Techniques by School Counselors, Teachers, and Parents

In the remainder of this article we offer suggestions for how school counselors can use play techniques to influence children's growth in each of Kaufman's (1989) interpersonal needs. School counselors help to reinforce the acquisition of developmental skills by collaborating with teachers and parents. This may require school counselors to model how to address interpersonal needs as teachers and parents engage in play with children in the classroom and at home. School counselors, teachers, and parents can work as a system to facilitate developmental growth in children.

Need for Relationship

Children feel secure knowing they are genuinely wanted. Mutual interest and enjoyment conveys to children that the relationship is genuine and valued.

Counselors. Counselors build a safe, accepting, non judgmental relationship with children through child centered play. For example, counselors and children can mutually enjoy using clay. Children will feel connected because the counselors are engaging in the same activity and they will feel accepted because there are no right or wrong ways to manipulate clay.

Teachers. Counselors model acceptance and listening skills in the classroom. Counselors support teachers in as they engage in mutually enjoyable classroom play or expressive activities which foster creativity and acceptance. These may include writing, drawing, manipulating clay, and exploring in a sand tray. Counselors acknowledge and validate teachers' efforts in the classroom to build safe, accepting relationships with children.

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Parents. Counselors provide parent training classes to validate parents' efforts to form accepting non judgmental relationships with their children. Counselors teach concepts of acceptance, limits, and choices to support parents as they foster accepting relationships within boundaries. Counselors model engaging in play with children.

Need for Touching and Holding

Touching and holding are principal ways of expressing affection. Expression of affection communicates comfort, protection, and security.

Counselors. Counselors provide a safe, accepting environment for group play involving touch. Children play active games, like Twister, which involve physical contact, or they participate in group drawings where they may rub elbows while reaching across the paper. Children develop their sense of touch by manipulating clay, running their fingers through a sand tray, or cuddling with a stuffed teddy bear.

Teachers. Counselors model appropriate touching in the classroom. For example, teachers provide opportunities for touching when they sit next to children on the floor in a reading area or when they have art projects like finger or foot painting.

Parents. Counselors provide parent training classes to validate parents' efforts to touch and hold their children. Counselors encourage parents to make time to hug their children, to sit next to them while reading a story, and to engage in activities which may involve touching like hiking, swimming, fishing, and walking.

Need for Identification

Identification establishes a sense of belonging, rootedness, and connectedness. When children can identify, they can emulate those they admire and feel a sense of belonging. Fulfillment of this need enhances children's sense of inner power and transmission of values.

Counselors. Counselors engage in play activities with children as a means of self-disclosure. They may play a game like the Ungame, for example. Through this process, children learn about things they have in common with their counselors, and they develop a sense of connectedness. Counselors facilitate group play with clear consistent rules, where children develop a sense of belonging.

Teachers. Counselors engage all children in a game or play activity and model conflict management skills during the play. Counselors encourage teachers to help children feel invested and rooted in the classroom by having children participate in classroom chores and by making acknowledgments such as "teacher's helper of the day" and "student of the day". Teachers engage the children in writing a class story.

Parents. Counselors provide parent training classes to teach parents to model the appropriate play behaviors that they want their children to emulate. Counselors encourage parents to involve children in household chores and to play together to create the sense of family belonging. Counselors remind parents that it is natural for children to play and therefore, to be creative and playful in doing household chores with their children.

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Need for Differentiation

Children need to develop a sense of separateness and differentness. They experience competence and mastery which allows a physical, emotional, and cognitive separation to develop between the parent and child.

Counselors. Counselors facilitate individual and group play while acknowledging children's unique characteristics. For example, children write, produce, and perform a puppet play which includes puppets with various personalities, intelligence levels, and talents. The counselor acknowledges each individual's contribution as uniquely important to the play.

Teachers. Counselors model using a "Coat of Arms" and other identity building activities in the classrooms. Counselors help teachers integrate the individual contributions of children into the daily classroom activities. Counselors work with teachers to provide play/work stations in the classroom where children can master individual skills. Teachers assign a writing task in which children write a story or journal about how they are unique.

Parents. Counselors provide parent training classes to encourage parents to acknowledge the uniqueness of their children as individuals. Counselors help parents to support their children in choosing play activities with which they will develop competencies and master skills.

Need to Nurture

Feeling nurturing enables children to feel loved and to feel that their love is good enough. This occurs through giving affection, assistance, gifts, or comfort.

Counselors. Counselors have play materials available which allow children to provide nurturing. These materials include medical kits, dolls, stuffed animals, and even live animals. Counselors model how to treat animals well and gently give and receive nurturing from a pet cat, for example.

Teachers. Counselors encourage teachers to engage children in nurturing activities such as caring for class pets, participating in classroom games with younger children as peer helpers, and having "pals for the week" at recess or when working on art projects.

Parents. Counselors provide parent training classes to demonstrate ways parents can help children to be nurturing at home. Counselors model how to offer positive comments to support being nurturing when children play with dolls or stuffed animals. Counselors encourage parents to ask children for small favors, to care for family pets, and to care for siblings (to the extent they are able). Parents are also taught to nurture themselves through play as models for their children.

Need for Affirmation

Children need to feel valued, recognized, and admired. This impacts on self-worth and esteem. When children are affirmed, they are able to affirm themselves. They become less dependent on others for their own sense of self-worth.

Counselors. With individuals and small groups counselors facilitate children's self affirmations and affirmations of others. These affirmations can be around drawings, group dramas, poetry, and story writing and telling.

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Teachers. Counselors model using affirming language in the classroom and encourage teachers to use affirming language. Counselors help teachers shape children's language to be self-affirming and affirming of others through play activities such as story writing, drawing, and playing games at recess.

Parents. Counselors provide parent training classes to teach using affirming language. Parents are shown how to incorporate affirming language into play with children and how to shape children's language to be self-affirming during their play.

Need for Power

This is a fundamental need for inner control and command of their lives. It is not an inherent need for power over others. To be able to influence the environment, to feel consulted, to have impact, to feel heard, to experience choice are experiences of the fulfilled need for power.

Counselors. Counselors give individuals and groups of children opportunities to make choices about the play activities and materials they use. Children are able to experience impact on their play environments by "fixing" a situation by making changes in sand play, by retelling a story with a different ending, or by solving a problem with puppets engaging in a conversation.

Teachers. Counselors model involving children in class drawing or writing projects and having children "show off" the projects. Counselors then work with teachers to integrate the project processes and products into the class curriculum. Counselors encourage teachers to seek student input regarding classroom rules and setting consequences to give students a sense of being consulted.

Parents. Counselors offer parent training classes to help parents facilitate responsibility at home through choices and decision-making in children's play. Counselors work with parents to develop keen listening skills and encourage parents to make sure their children are heard as they tell a story, fantasize about their doll family, show and talk about an art project, build a block tower, or make clay figures.

Summary

School counselors help teachers and parents understand the value of play in children's development. Counselors encourage and offer support as teachers and parents engage in play with children. When counselors, teachers, and parents use play techniques with an accepting, safe relationship they will foster development of children's interpersonal needs which are fused with positive experiences at school and at home.

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